

March 27, 1986

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IMPACT AND CHURCHESIMPACT 'CONTRA' VOTE

DPS 86063

WASHINGTON (DPS, March 27) -- More than 80 Episcopalians, lay people and clergy, joined with representatives of 20 Christian and Jewish faith groups for the 14th IMPACT Congressional Briefing, March 16-19 here. The Briefing provided grass-roots leaders a close look at legislation before Congress and showed them how to have an effective impact on the national political process.

The potential of that impact that was seen the day after the Briefing, when the House of Representatives defeated President Reagan's \$100 million aid package to the "Contras" attempting to overthrow the government of Nicaragua by a vote of 222 to 210. Steve Champlin, a spokesman for Rep. David E. Bonior (D-Mich.), a leader in the House opposition to the "Contra" funding, said, "The churches made the difference on this vote. Absent the churches, we would have lost at least those 12 votes" that provided the margin of victory.

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The Rev. Dr. William L. Weiler, director of the Episcopal Church's Washington Office, commented, "More than one thousand visits by the IMPACT delegates to members of Congress contributed greatly to this victory." The Rev. Leland Wilson, Weiler's counterpart for the Church of the Brethren, said, "The amount of contact between churches and Congress on this vote has been unprecedented." He called the lobbying drive the "most concentrated push" by churches since the civil rights and Vietnam War days.

Keynote speaker for the Briefing was the Dean of New York Theological Seminary, Gayraud Wilmore. Wilmore urged the ecumenical assembly not to warm themselves at the fire of the enemy, as the apostle Peter did the night when he denied Jesus. Rather, religious leaders must openly acknowledge their theological commitment in the political arena, as they seek justice for the poor and the oppressed.

Plenary sessions during the four-day Briefing ranged over the areas: Peace, Poverty, and Human Rights. Participants heard presentations from legislators and other experts who encouraged and trained them to make calls on their members of Congress, urging them to support legislation in these areas. Most Episcopalians at the Briefing had also attended an Episcopal Church-sponsored advocacy training conference prior to the IMPACT Briefing itself. (Eds.: see DPS 86064 following)

The Episcopal delegation was hosted by Weiler, whose office monitors national legislation affecting the Episcopal Church's worldwide ministry, while conveying to the Congress the actions of the Episcopal Church taken by General Convention and Executive Council.

Briefing participants were urged repeatedly to declare their faith, while seeking change in government policy. Representative Charles Rangel of New York challenged the religious leaders, "You people of faith should come out in the open, and let us politicians know where your religious body stands. If we don't do what is right, then the Church should use the power of the vote to throw us out of office."

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The Episcopal delegates gathered for dinner at the "Church of the Presidents," St. John's, Lafayette Square. Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania told the group of his opposition to aid for the "Contras" in Nicaragua. He noted, "Both the 'Contras' and the Sandistas are guilty of human rights violations."

Veteran CBS correspondent Neil E. Strawser addressed the Episcopalians on the deficit reduction legislation, the "Gramm-Rudman-Hollings" act. Pointing out that the national debt has doubled in the last five years, Strawser said, "The chances of the Gramm-Rudman deficit reduction targets being met are clouded." Real income for American families has declined the last eleven years, the commentator said. "The real fact is" he continued, "that the Carter administration produced twice as many new jobs as the Reagan administration has...In reality, the great recovery claimed by Reagan is very limited."

Commenting on political tensions in Latin America, Bonior, a Roman Catholic layman, told the Briefing delegates, "The Churches of this land are the single most important force in working for peace in Central America."

Robert Brown, an Episcopal priest from Los Angeles, said of the Briefing, "It is a formidable task to come to Washington as an advocate on the federal level for the first time. However, being here with other people and learning the techniques for lobbying was helpful. Now I feel equipped to lobby, and to train others back home to do so too."

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EPISCOPALIANS HONE

PUBLIC POLICY SKILLS

DPS 86064

by Frances Antonucci

Diocese of Washington

WASHINGTON (DPS, March 26) -- It is generally accepted that to have an effective ministry in the world, the Church must take a stand on social issues. But to have a share in shaping public policy means learning how to influence decision-makers.

With this in mind, and galvanized by General Convention resolutions, the Episcopal Church's Public Policy Network and its Partner Networks sponsored a two-day "Training for Advocacy" conference here March 15-16, appropriately on Capitol Hill.

More than 90 Episcopalians from 25 states who attended the conference heard direct answers to questions such as: What theological basis exists for advocacy? How do we best prepare to approach a member of Congress? What efforts might be made at the state level?

Speakers included the Rev. Kwasi Thornell, a canon at the Washington Cathedral, who reminded the group that since Old Testament times God has intervened in human history through the lives of ordinary people. Today God's people have an equally strong command to care for one another. It is not an option, said Thornell.

"Praying alone is not enough when the world is headed for destruction," he added asserting that our task is to promote and enable justice. Ray Marvin, executive director of the Association of Attornies General, supported this viewpoint and offered suggestions for getting past the rhetoric to become a truly effective lobbyist.

Conference participants learned that being self righteous doesn't work; being informed, knowing one's strong and weak points as well as those of the opposition, and being a good debater are vital tools. There is no substitute for developing a plan -- a strategy.

Knowing the many roles the Representatives and Senators are forced to play is critical to developing the most effective approach, said Erica Foldy, acting director of The Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy. Her analysis of a typical member of Congress reveals a statesman, representative, broker, party member, candidate and a "regular" person.

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The lobbyist must know how to appeal to each of these roles, and that requires careful research on the individual, the issue, the opposition, supporters and sources of income, she added.

And lobbying efforts are not confined to Capitol Hill. "We have lost sight of the potential power that states have," said the Hon. Byron Rushing, a state legislator from Massachusetts and president of the Episcopal Urban Caucus. He cited "a new federalism" as reason for organizing more aggressively at the state level. "Advocacy is a Gospel-centered idea," said Rushing, "and the average person doesn't lobby."

There were small-group opportunities to allow participants to explore different scenarios in actual lobbying situations. The would-be lobbyists, for example, tested possible courses of action when the Representative is not in, when he will not let them get a word in, etc.

Public Policy Network Coordinator Nancy Deppen, working with the National Mission staff at the Church Center and with the Partner Networks, identified the following legislative priorities prior to the conference: domestic nutrition, federal budget priorities, MX missile, chemical warfare, foreign policy, Indian health care, refugees, family violence/child abuse, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1985 and foreign aid and development.

The Partner Networks, including Episcopal Ministry on Aging, Episcopal Peace Fellowship, National Episcopal Coalition on Alcohol and Appalachian People Service Organization held workshops to discuss these areas of concern, with General Convention resolutions and legislation before Congress as the bases for individual and cooperative advocacy action plans.

Some of those plans were set in motion almost immediately. Many conference participants remained on Capitol Hill to join other denominational representatives for the 14th Annual IMPACT Congressional Briefing over the three days following the Conference. During the briefing, the Episcopal contingent found opportunities to apply their lessons in advocacy to tough legislative issues before Congress.

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IMPACT is an ecumenical grassroots lobbying group headed by an Episcopal priest, the Rev. Craig Biddle. Lobbying efforts on behalf of the Episcopal Church are the responsibility of the Rev. William Weiler, a member of the Church Center staff who resides in Washington. The Public Policy Network, sponsor of the advocacy training conference, was mandated by the 1982 General Convention as part of the Jubilee Ministry resolution. The Jubilee Ministry Office at the Episcopal Church Center also provided funding for four Jubilee Center directors to attend both the training and the IMPACT Briefing.

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BROWNING JOINS PLEA
FOR ANTI-TORTURE PACT

DPS 86065

NEW YORK, (DPS March 27) -- Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning has joined a number of heads of other churches in an open Good Friday letter to President Reagan urging US support for a United Nations compact against torture.

The letter (**Eds: text attached**) was developed by the Pennsylvania-based American Christians for the Abolition of Torture group and was offered to a number of daily newspapers as an "op-ed" piece for the Good Friday editions. The letter notes that the US supported the convention from its introduction in 1977 through unanimous General Assembly passage in late 1984 but has still not signed it. Some 46 countries have done so.

Referring to Christ's death by torture, the letter asserts that "as Christians seeking to be faithful to the Crucified One, we cannot be silent. We must confront this loathsome inhumanity and do so in a spirit of urgency, compassion and forgiveness."

The World Council of Churches, the Vatican, the Baptist World Alliance and many denominations -- including the Episcopal Church -- have spoken out repeatedly against torture, especially its use as an instrument of state policy. Amnesty International claims that one-third of the world nations use torture this way.

The Reagan State Department made a strong pitch for passage of the Covenant in 1984, and the US has already signed and ratified another covenant which incorporates many of the clauses of this compact. The value of the current document lies in its potential use as a broadly-accepted international legal instrument.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN

Dear Mr. President:

On this holiest of days, as we remember the agonizing death by torture of Jesus Christ, we are constrained to write to you concerning the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This is an urgent matter on the U.S.'s international agenda.

From 1977 to the adoption of the Convention by a unanimous vote of the U.N. General Assembly -- the first human rights instrument to be so adopted -- on December 10, 1984, the U.S. consistently supported it. As the State Department declared (on September 18, 1984), "The U.S. considers that the draft convention constitutes the best possible draft, fairly representing a carefully considered composite of various views." It urged the U.N. to adopt the Convention "as a matter of priority." To that effort we pledged "strong support."

Yet when 21 nations came together to sign the Convention on February 4, 1985, the U.S. was not among them. Nor was it among the 25 nations which have signed the Convention since.

As there has been no indication from your administration of any second thoughts, we assume it was because of the priority you assigned to getting the Genocide Convention ratified that no action has yet been taken on the Convention against Torture. Now, happily, the Genocide Convention has been ratified. We congratulate you for that. We urge you now to turn your attention to the Convention against Torture.

As you know, the use of torture as an instrument of state policy is a growing phenomenon in the community of nations. According to Amnesty International, it is practiced in over one-third of all nations.

Because the use of torture has been growing, many nations have urged the adoption of effective legal measures to reverse that trend and bring about the abolition of torture. It was because the Convention will provide such effective legal means that the State Department endorsed it, calling it "an outstanding achievement," offering "a major new instrument of control," one which provides "a workable, effective system of universal criminal jurisdiction." It singled out for praise the implementation system, which consists of a Committee against Torture, describing it as "a well-conceived, adequately-circumscribed scheme which contains the minimal elements necessary for assuring effective control over and compliance with the Convention."

We join the State Department in asserting that the Convention is a significant piece of legislation, a crucial step forward. For the first time it sets up mechanisms to assure fact-finding and supervision with regard to charges of torture. It makes the obligations of states

to prevent and punish torture more stringent. It strengthens legal guarantees against this crime and declares torture to be a punishable crime, so that perpetrators may be tried wherever they are found.

In other words the Convention helps to realize the prophecy of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second District (in the famous Filartiga case) that prohibition of torture is becoming "part of the evolving law of nations:

The torturer has become, like the pirate and the slavetrader before him...an enemy of all mankind."

Though the Convention has limitations and will over the years need to be strengthened, we agree with the representative of the Netherlands who declared that it "represents the limits presently possible for an international agreement." It has now been signed by, among others, the following nations: Argentina, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and Uruguay. France and Sweden have already ratified it.

On this day we as Christians feel an awesome responsibility to speak out against torture. By his willingness to submit to death by a particularly heinous form of torture, our Lord entered into solidarity with all those who in any age are tortured. When they suffer, he continues to suffer. As Christians seeking to be faithful to the Crucified One, we cannot be silent. We must confront this loathsome inhumanity, and do so in a spirit of urgency, compassion, and forgiveness. We are empowered by the hope Christ's Resurrection gives us. (From They Know Not What They Do -- A Christian Call for the Abolition of Torture, American Christians for the Abolition of Torture, 1984.)

We are reiterating what has become a consensus of the world Christian community. As the World Council of Churches has put it:

We stand today under God's judgment, for in our generation the darkness, deceit, and inhumanity of the torture chamber have become a more widespread and atrocious reality than at any other time in history ...We recognize that there remain certain differences of interpretation of human rights, and that sometimes different priorities are set for the implementation of human rights according to varying social-economic, political, and cultural contexts, but on the point of torture there can be no difference of opinion.

Torture is one of a group of actions which the Second Vatican Council described as "against life itself and offensive to the dignity of the human person," which:

With this in mind the Holy See signed the 1975 U.N. Declaration against Torture:

The Baptist World Alliance asserted in 1985 that: It is fitting and proper expression of the sovereignty of God...to speak forthrightly and take action in our lives against torture...as incompatible with the teachings of Christ Jesus.

With this as background the religious non-governmental organizations at the U.N. have stated, "We view the Convention's adoption as a critical development in U.N. efforts to safeguard human rights. We commit ourselves to work for the Convention's speedy entry into force."

And so, on this Good Friday, Mr. President, we urge you to direct our U.N. Ambassador, General Walters, to sign the Convention and that you submit it immediately to the Senate for ratification. As you and the Congress have already approved the 1984 Joint Resolution on Torture which contains most of the provisions of the international convention, ratification should present no serious problems. We look with hope to the US's return to a leading role in promoting action against torture.

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NEW ZEALAND BISHOP'S

ELECTION BLOCKED

DPS 86066

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (DPS, March 27) -- The standing committees of seven of the eight dioceses in the Church of the Province of New Zealand -- including the Diocese of Wellington -- have failed to ratify the episcopal election by the synod of that diocese of Quaker and Anglican clergyman the Rev. Canon Paul Oestreicher, who had been nominated with an 85 percent majority. (Eds.: see DPS 86044)

Oestreicher, 54, who currently lives in England, is a naturalized citizen of New Zealand and is of German Jewish background. He is known for his involvement in the anti-nuclear movement in Britain, where he has served as vice-president of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The Diocese of Wellington is having trouble naming a successor to retired Bishop Edward Norman. In November, the diocesan synod chose a conservative theologian, who refused the nomination. A second synod in February chose Oestreicher. A third synod will now be held, probably in mid-April, and Oestreicher has agreed to allow his name to be re-submitted.

The Wellington standing committee which voted against Oestreicher is made up of about 30 of the 250 general synod members who nominated him. Standing committee members have refused to comment on the vote. It is said that the percentage of support for Oestreicher among the clergy and laity in general has remained the same as when he was nominated.

While the nominating synod knew that Oestreicher was a Quaker, that seems to have been a stumbling block for some of the bishops and standing committees. The decision to take dual membership was made by the Canon after the General Synod of the Church of England voted down a covenant scheme under which Anglican and other Protestant denominations would have moved closer towards unity. Oestreicher described his action as "my way of contributing to church unity. It is an ecumenical gesture." He added that "if the churches cannot break the barriers, it is up to their members to show that you can be a good, faithful Christian and belong to more than one part of Christ's body."

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P. B. FUND GETS,
GIVES GRANTS

DPS 86067

NEW YORK (DPS, March 27) -- The Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief has already made a number of grants this year to alleviate "emergency" situations, but the Fund has also recieved a grant -- from the Diocese of North Carolina in memory of the Rev. Lex Mathews, who for more than a decade was director of Christian Social Ministries there and who also served as Presiding Bishop's Fund Network representative from the Diocese of North Carolina,

Shortly before Christmas, Mathews died in a boating accident. In mid-February, the Rev. Canon Samir J. Habiby, executive director of the Presiding Bishop's Fund received a hand-written note from the Rt. Rev. Robert Estill, bishop of North Carolina, and a check for \$50,000 as a tribute to Mathews. Estill wrote, "While we would like to see it used for world hunger, we will leave the specific need and designation to you." Habiby called the designation "highly appropriate," noting Mathews' years of interest and work in the area of world hunger.

The money, taken from undesignated fund balances, had been granted by the diocesan council to the Fund. At the same time, the council had appropriated the same amount, from similar sources, for local outreach, also as a memorial to Mathews.

Meanwhile, the work of the Fund continues.

The Dioceses of Northern California and San Joaquin each received \$10,000 emergency grants early in March to aid areas in those dioceses affected by recent floods.

Internationally, the Fund has contributed an \$8,000 emergency grant to the World Council of Churches' Asia Floods Fund to provide relief to countries such as India, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Bangladesh, which have also been affected by floods.

The Philippines Independent Church received a separate emergency grant of \$10,000 to assist in the rehabilitation of church buildings damaged by a typhoon last October.

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In another area of the world hit by recent civil unrest, the Diocese of Haiti was granted \$15,000 for an emergency program to aid poor victims of that unrest by helping approximately 200 families to start small business enterprises.

The Emergency Stage (cq) of Health in Sectors of Huaycan project in Peru also received an emergency grant from the Fund. The \$7,000 will go to assist in an ecumenical effort to provide sanitary and health care for the poor and the sick, as well as to help provide pregnant mothers with proper feeding for their children.

Sharing is something the Church has been doing since the days when St. Paul organized relief efforts among Gentile congregations for the Jewish ones hit by famine, but it still goes on. Of the \$5,000 emergency grant sent by the Fund to Colombia late last year, \$125 came from the Diocese of Northern Mexico, itself still involved in relief efforts for the Mexico City earthquake, and included in the \$46,579.90 worth of funds collected and sent to the Diocese of Central and South Mexico in response to the earthquake was \$1,000 from the Diocese of El Salvador "as a gesture of solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Mexico...the Mexican tragedy is also our tragedy, and we hope our prayers will help them with their pain."

The Episcopal Church in Honduras, poorest Hispanic nation in the Western hemisphere, also came to the aid of their disaster-struck fellow Central Americans. Honduras split its offering to the Presiding Bishop's Fund between Mexico and Colombia. Bishop Leo Frade said the decision wasn't an easy one: "At first we decided to designate half for relief in Mexico and half for poverty relief in Honduras. Then the volcano erupted in Colombia. We finally decided the Lord would have us reach all the way outside of those who are our own."

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